

East and Southern Africa

July 2003

Background

The USAID-funded LINKAGES Project began work with the Regional Economic Development Services Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA) in 1997 under the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative (GHAI). The original objectives of GHAI were to improve food security and prevent conflict in the region using five basic principles to guide program implementation: 1) ensuring African ownership, 2) promoting strategic coordination, 3) linking relief and development, 4) promoting regional approaches, and 5) assuming underlying instability in the region. LINKAGES has specifically contributed to the food security objective with particular emphasis on improving infant and young child nutrition. More recently, LINKAGES has received support from REDSO for work on nutrition and HIV/AIDS in the region.

Malnutrition is decreasing in every region of the world except sub-Saharan Africa. Countries continue to report high prevalence rates of stunting, wasting, and undernutrition, and poor rates of exclusive breastfeeding, timely initiation of breastfeeding, and timely complementary feeding. The region is also plagued with related health and food security problems. Each year, approximately 2.4 million people in sub-Saharan Africa die from HIV/AIDS-related illnesses, 600,000 from tuberculosis, and 1 million from malaria. For children, the situation is especially serious: 800,000 die from diarrhea, 1.2 million from pneumonia, 500,000 from measles, and 600,000 from malaria. Malnutrition is the underlying cause of 53 % of these deaths. The burden of disease and malnutrition in the region is exacerbated by drought, conflict, and a depressed economy. With REDSO support, the LINKAGES project has worked closely with other USAID-funded projects and regional partners to combat these trends, concentrating its efforts in two technical areas: 1) nutrition and HIV/AIDS and 2) infant, young child, and maternal nutrition.

Regional Partners

LINKAGES activities in East and Southern Africa contribute to REDSO's strategic objective: *enhanced regional capacity to improve health sys-*



tems. LINKAGES offers extensive technical and some administrative support to the activities of two partners in the region: the Regional Centre for Quality of Health Care (RCQHC) in Kampala, Uganda, and the East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community Secretariat (ECSA HCS), formerly known as the Commonwealth Regional Health Community Secretariat (CRHCS) in Arusha, Tanzania.

Regional Centre for Quality of Health Care

RCQHC has over 1,000 members from government, private, and NGO sectors in 20 countries. The regional organization works to build capacity to improve quality of health care through the promotion of better practices, networking, and education. LINKAGES works most closely with RCQHC's nutrition and child health program and supports a staff member based at RCQHC.

East, Central, and Southern Africa Health Community Secretariat

ECSA HCS is comprised of 12 member states from East, Central, and Southern Africa. The body is directed by a Conference of Health Ministers that convenes once a year to discuss pressing health concerns of their region. LINKAGES' work has been through the food and nutrition program at ECSA HCS and more recently with the nursing and midwifery program.

Technical Foci

Nutrition and HIV/AIDS and an integrated package of essential nutrition actions are the technical foci for this regional initiative. A team from LINKAGES, FANTA, and SARA—three USAID-funded projects managed by the Academy for Educational Development (AED)—along with REDSO, RCQHC, and ECSA HCS collaborate on nutrition and HIV/AIDS activities. The LINKAGES Project offers technical assistance on improved feeding practices to prevent mother-to-child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV as well as nutrition care for HIV-infected women and children. The team provides technical assistance on nutrition care and support for all population groups living with HIV/AIDS, nutritional management of HIV/AIDS-related symptoms, management of drug-food interactions in HIV/AIDS therapy, and household food security.

The second technical focus is promotion of the **essential nutrition action (ENA) package**. The ENA approach is based on a set of actions that are scientifically proven to improve the nutrition of women and children.

The ENA approach is implemented through health worker counseling and interactions with pregnant women and mothers with children under two years of age at six key contact points: antenatal care, delivery and immediate postpartum, postnatal and family planning, immunization, growth monitoring/well child, and sick child consultation.

Programming Priorities

The REDSO/ESA-supported activities of LINKAGES and its partners should have a regional orientation as stated in the strategic objective. When the program was initiated in 1997, LINKAGES focused programming activities in Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda within the Greater Horn region. While many activities are ongoing in these countries, the program has now expanded its coverage to include several other countries of East and Southern Africa. Programming priorities include: 1) curricula development and training; 2) policy, advocacy, and national guidelines development; and 3) development of community-level programming tools.

Seven Essential Nutrition Actions

- 1) Promotion of optimal breastfeeding during the first six months
- 2) Promotion of appropriate complementary feeding beginning at six months with continued breastfeeding to two years and beyond
- 3) Promotion of feeding of the child during and after illness
- 4) Prevention of vitamin A deficiency (breastfeeding, consumption of fortified and vitamin A-rich foods, maternal and child supplementation)
- 5) Prevention of anemia (maternal and child iron supplementation, deworming, malaria control, consumption of fortified and iron-rich foods)
- 6) Promotion of iodized salt consumption by all families
- 7) Promotion of improved women's nutrition (increased food intake during pregnancy and lactation, iron/folic acid supplementation, treatment and prevention of malaria, deworming during pregnancy, and postpartum vitamin A supplementation)

Training and Curricula Development

LINKAGES, RCQHC, and other partners have developed two extensive training guides—one on the Essential Nutrition Actions and the other on Nutrition and HIV/AIDS—and have offered curricula development workshops on each of the subject matters. The ENA in-service training module is a five-day course designed to help managers of health programs prioritize nutrition actions and to integrate them into policies, communications, and interventions in health facilities and communities.

In August 2002 a five-day workshop with tutors from 10 training institutions in the region was held to review module sessions for pre-service curricula on nutrition and HIV. Following the workshop, RCQHC and the LINKAGES, FANTA, and SARA projects worked closely to incorporate feedback received at the workshop to develop a pre-service training manual. The training manual

is designed to provide a comprehensive source of information on nutrition and HIV and to assist tutors in course/topic planning. The topics in the training manual include: 1) basics of HIV/AIDS in Africa, 2) links between nutrition and HIV/AIDS, 3) nutrition actions for people living with HIV/AIDS, 4) household food security and HIV/AIDS, 5) nutritional management of HIV/AIDS-related symptoms, 6) counseling and nutritional care for pregnant and lactating women and adolescent girls infected with HIV/AIDS, 7) infant feeding and prevention of mother-to-child-transmission of HIV, 8) nutritional care for children born of women infected with HIV, and 9) management of drug-food interactions in HIV/AIDS therapy. The intended users of the manual are medical or health sciences students, applied human nutrition students, dietetics or home economics students, and food technology and agriculture students. Follow-up support and further pre-service training (for nurses and midwives) on nutrition and HIV is currently being planned.

Nutrition Policy and Advocacy

Lack of recognition of nutrition's importance as a development issue by policymakers, planners, and the general public is a major constraint to improved nutrition in the region. In May 1999, LINKAGES and CRHCS (ECSA HCS) organized a 10-day nutrition advocacy workshop in Arusha, Tanzania. Fourteen nutritionists, health professionals, and health planners from Kenya, Tanzania, Uganda, Eritrea, and Ethiopia were introduced to *Profiles*.

Profiles is a nutrition advocacy process designed to demonstrate the contribution that improved nutrition can make to human and economic development. *Profiles* uses country-specific data and interactive computer-based models to project the consequences of sub-optimal breastfeeding practices and inadequate dietary practices on mortality, illness, health care costs, and fertility. In addition to the regional *Profiles* training workshop, GHAI has supported the following *Profiles* workshops:

- ◆ Kenya, March 2000, with the RCQHC as co-facilitator
- ◆ Uganda, June 2000, with the RCQHC and the African Medical Research Foundation as co-facilitators
- ◆ Tanzania, September 2000, with the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre as co-facilitator
- ◆ Zimbabwe, November 2002, with technical and facilitation support only from RCQHC

LINKAGES and its partners at ECSA HCS and RCQHC continue to provide guidance and support for capacity building in nutrition advocacy and the use of *Profiles* for promoting nutrition within larger national policies and strategies including the poverty reduction strategies papers (PRSP), health sector reforms, and mid-term expenditure frameworks. Support has also been provided to countries in the region for the development of national guidelines on nutrition and HIV and the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV. As well, the national nutrition coalitions from Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania have been supported in the past by RCQHC, LINKAGES, and its partners for nutrition policy and advocacy activities, particularly the better practices assessments described below.

Community Programming Resources

Several community-level programming materials have been developed for use across the region.

In 1999 LINKAGES collaborated with African organizations, institutions, and professionals in Kenya, Uganda, and Tanzania to identify "better practices" in community nutrition programs that had led to positive nutrition outcomes. A "better practice" is one that can be institutionalized, yields measurable results, and is both feasible and replicable. The process involved in preparing and conducting the better practices assessments was designed to utilize regional resources and expertise, link organizations, rejuvenate national nutrition planning, and strengthen institutional capacity in nutrition program assessment and advocacy.

LINKAGES contracted with the Program for Applied Technologies in Health (PATH)/Kenya, the African Medical Research Foundation (AMREF)/Uganda, and the Tanzania Food and Nutrition Centre (TFNC)/Tanzania to coordinate the process in their respective countries. PATH, AMREF, and TFNC participated in a four-day orientation and methodology meeting in Nairobi in July 1999. Following this meeting, they established *national nutrition coalitions* with key nutrition stakeholders from government, academia, donors, and non-governmental organizations. One of the first tasks of the Nutrition Core Group in Uganda, the Kenya Coalition for Action in Nutrition, and the National Consultative Group in Tanzania was to compile an inventory of community nutrition programs and to identify the most successful ones for review during the assessment.

Together with members of the coalitions, PATH, AMREF, and TFNC each undertook three field assessments of successful community nutrition programs. In May 2000 they met with the nutrition coalition in their respective country to share the assessment findings. A final document—*Successful Community Nutrition Programming: Lessons from Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda*—was disseminated to nutrition policy makers, planners, and program managers describing the programs and synthesizing lessons learned. The national nutrition coalitions, particularly from Kenya and Uganda, remain active in their respective countries and continue to coordinate and work to address the most pressing nutrition-related problems.

Nutrition job aids for regions with low and high HIV prevalence were developed for use by health workers at six points of contact in the health delivery system. Accompanying the nutrition job aids are extensive orientation training manuals for each contact point. LINKAGES is also supporting RCQHC in developing protocols for primary health care workers to counsel mothers on infant feeding and HIV. An activity

to develop counseling materials on nutrition and HIV for community workers is currently underway by RCQHC, LINKAGES, FANTA, SARA, and other partners.

Future Directions

Problems related to and heightened by malnutrition impede development in East and Southern Africa. The LINKAGES Project together with its partners at AED, RCQHC, and ECSA HCS will continue to work to improve policy and programming interventions related to nutrition and HIV/AIDS. Concentrating resources into pre-service curricula will prepare future professionals for the challenges they will face in the region. Emphasis will continue to be placed on capacity building in nutrition advocacy to ensure that nutrition-related issues are present in country strategies and priorities. At the community level, materials and resources will be developed and disseminated to assist those who provide counseling on nutrition, HIV/ADS, and infant and young child feeding.

LINKAGES is a USAID-funded program providing technical information, assistance, and training to organizations on breastfeeding, related complementary feeding and maternal dietary practices, and the lactational amenorrhea method (a modern postpartum method of contraception for women who breastfeed). LINKAGES also provides technical assistance in the prevention of mother-to-child transmission of HIV to help mothers understand the balance of risks so they can make informed infant feeding choices.

**Regional Centre for
Quality of Health Care**



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